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THE FARM TENANCY SITUATION IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Statement for Farm Tenancy Conference
San Francisco, California
January 12, 1937.

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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE
SPOKANE, WASHINGTON
REGION 11



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Resettlement Administration, Region XI,
~~Mayer Building~~
~~Portland, Oregon~~

THE FARM TENANT SITUATION IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Statement for Farm Tenancy Conference
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Department of Agriculture, Region II
Hague Building
Portland, Oregon

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Statement for Farm Tenancy Conference, San Francisco, January 12, 1937

by
H. E. Selby, Regional Chief
Land Use Planning Section
Resettlement Administration, Region XI

Those familiar with the statistics of farm tenancy in the United States, as are most of the members of this conference, have noted that the highest percentage of farm tenancy is found in the southern, middle-western, and mountain states. In the Pacific Northwest the percentage of tenancy is not yet excessively high, and it may have been concluded that there is no pressing tenancy problem there. I would like to call attention, however, to a few aspects of the tenancy situation in the Pacific Northwest that merit consideration.

Farm tenancy in Washington, Oregon and Idaho, as in most other parts of the country, has been increasing over a period of many years. From 1890 to 1935 the percentage of all farms that are operated by tenants has increased from 13 to 22 per cent in Oregon, from 8 to 20 per cent in Washington, and from 5 to 29 per cent in Idaho. (Figure 1) The increase has been most rapid and the percentage of tenancy is now highest in the state of Idaho, but the rate of increase in all three states has been greater than that in the United States as a whole.

It is true that even with this continued increase the amount of tenancy in these states is still considerably below that in several other parts of the country and below the average of the country as a whole. There has been a marked acceleration in the rate of increase,

THE RAIN TERNARY SITUATION IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST
Statement for the Tern Ternary Commission, January 12, 1937

by
H. B. Colby, Regional Editor
Land Use Planning Section
Recreation Administration, Region XI

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Rain ternary in Washington, Oregon and Idaho, as in most other parts of the country, has been increasing over a period of many years. From 1900 to 1930 the percentage of all terns that are operated by tenants has increased from 15 to 25 per cent in Oregon, from 5 to 20 per cent in Washington, and from 5 to 20 per cent in Idaho. (Figure 1) The increase has been most rapid and the percentage of ternary is now highest in the state of Idaho, but the rate of increase in all three states has been greater than that in the United States as a whole. It is true that even with this continued increase the amount of ternary in these states is still considerably below that in several other parts of the country and below the average of the country as a whole. There has been a marked acceleration in the rate of increase

PERCENTAGE OF ALL FARMS THAT WERE
OPERATED BY TENANTS
Oregon, Washington, and Idaho
1890 - 1935

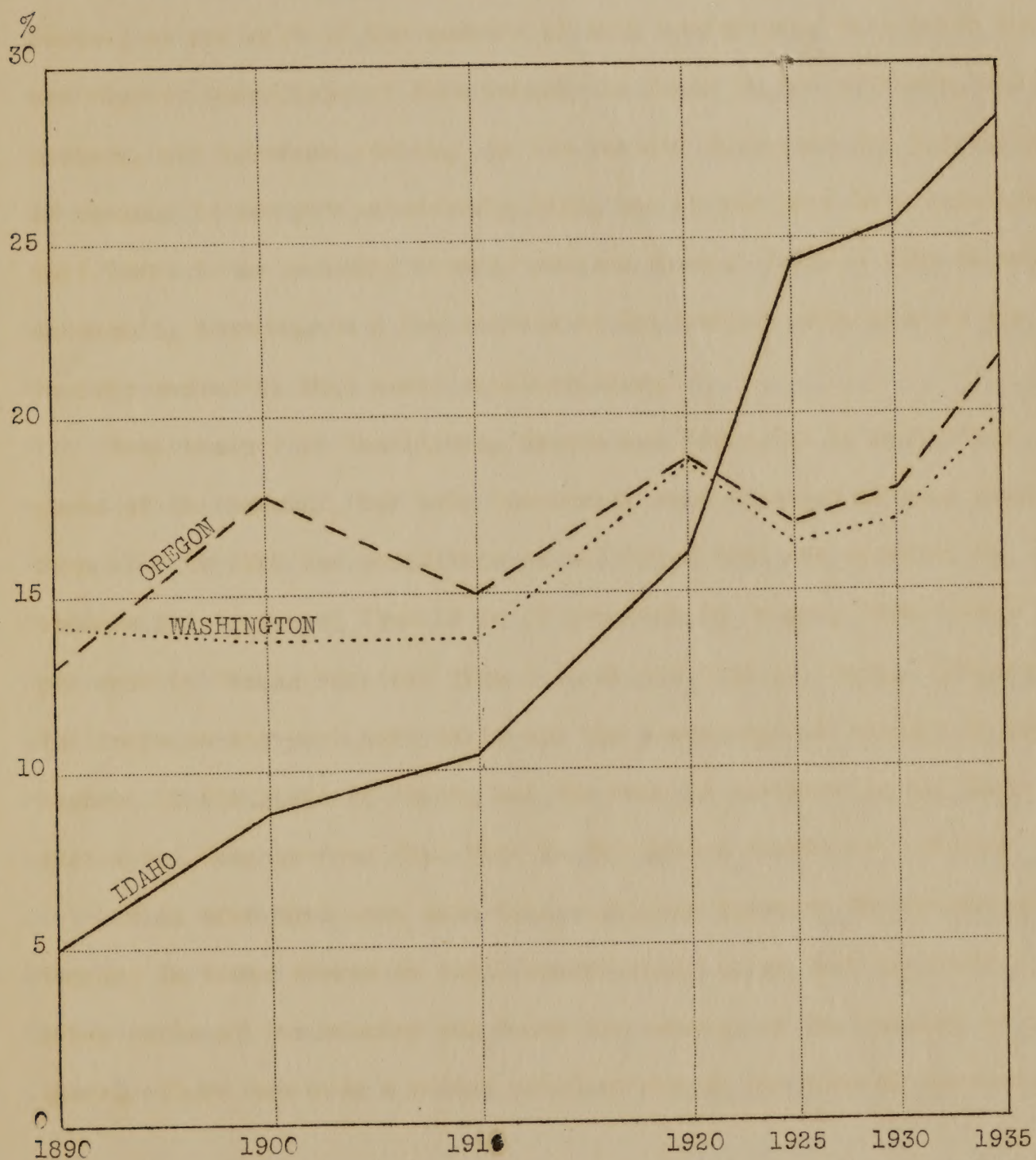


FIGURE 1

PERCENTAGE OF ALL PAIRS THAT WERE
OPERATED BY TENANTS
Oregon, Washington, and Idaho
1930 - 1935

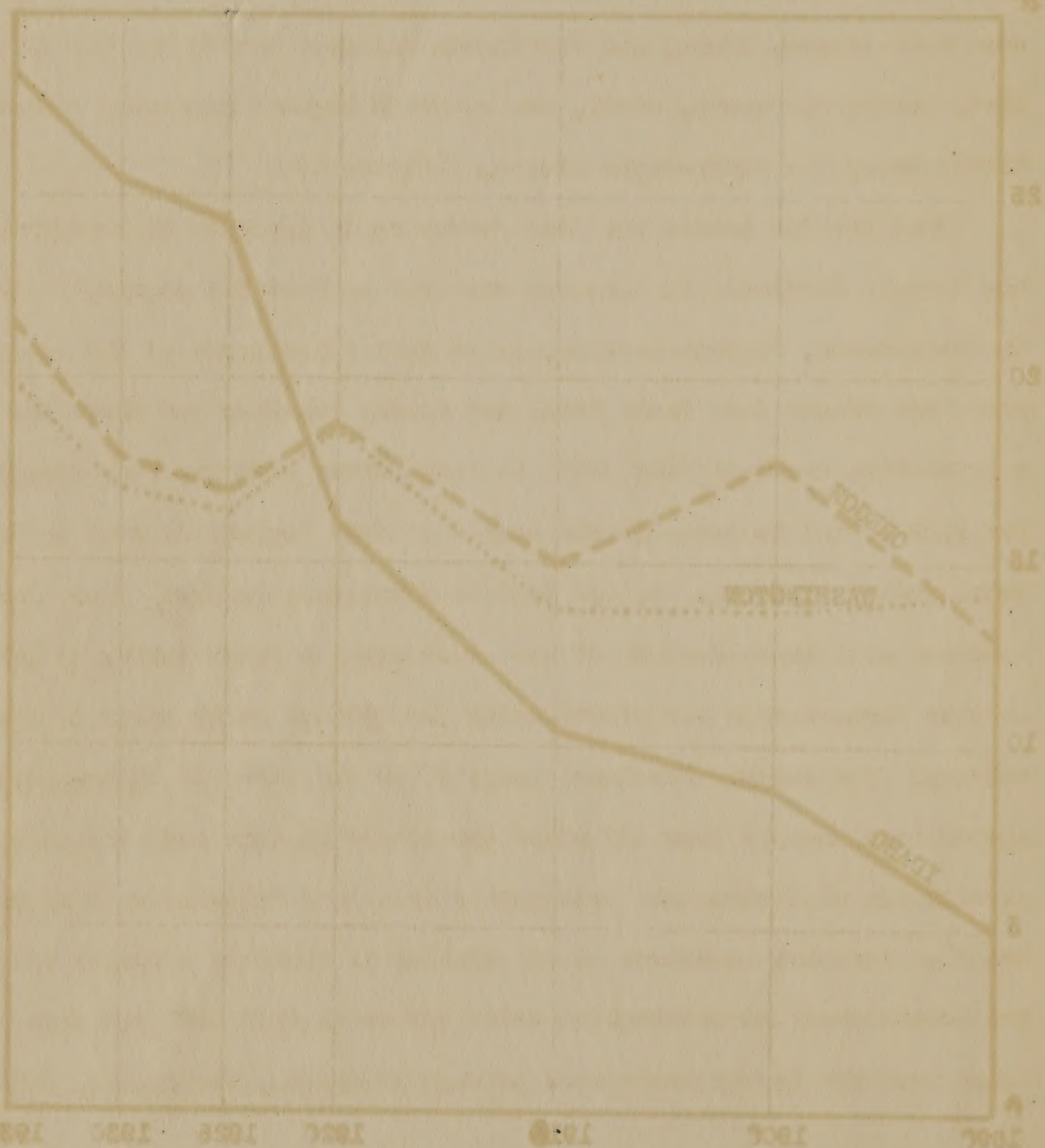


FIGURE 1

however, in the last five-year census period, 1930-1935. In this last five years the number of farm tenants has increased 22 per cent in Idaho, 39 per cent in Washington, and 44 per cent in Oregon. A 44 per cent increase in farm tenants in a five-year period perhaps is at least approaching a condition to be viewed with alarm.

Comparing the three Pacific Northwest states with the other states in the country as to the increase in percentage of farm tenants, it is seen that Oregon, Idaho, and Washington are well toward the top of the list, having the sixth, ninth, and eleventh highest increases respectively among the forty-eight states. (Figure 2)

What are the causes for this recent rapid increase in tenancy in the Pacific Northwest as compared with the rest of the country? During the depression, in this section, as in most other parts of the country, many farm owners lost their farms and became tenants; and there has been a population movement from urban to rural areas that has been responsible for much of the increase in the number of farm tenants as well as in the total number of farms. In the Pacific Northwest, however, there has been combined with these results of the depression, a great influx of prospective farmers from the drouth areas and various other parts of the country. The Pacific Northwest seems to be the Mecca of under-privileged agricultural people from all other areas, who migrate out here with the expectation of finding new opportunity in a land "flowing with milk and honey". That this movement is not abating is shown by a survey made by the Resettlement Administration which indicates that 8800 new farm families from the drouth areas have located in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho

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however, in the last five years the number of farm tenants has increased 25 per cent in Idaho, 35 per cent in Washington, and 40 per cent in Oregon. A 44 per cent increase in farm tenants in a five-year period is at least equivalent to a condition to be viewed with alarm.

Comparing the three Pacific Northwest States with the other States in the country as to the increase in percentage of farm tenants, it is seen that Oregon, Idaho, and Washington are well toward the top of the list, having the third, fourth, and eleventh highest increases respectively among the forty-eight States. (Figure 2)

What are the causes for this rapid increase in farm tenancy in the Pacific Northwest as compared with the rest of the country? During the depression, in this section, as in most other parts of the country, many farm owners lost their farms and became tenants; and there has been a population movement from urban to rural areas that has been responsible for much of the increase in the number of farm tenants as well as in the total number of farms. In the Pacific Northwest, however, there has been combined with these results of the depression, a great influx of new

positive farmers from the drought areas and various other parts of the country. The Pacific Northwest seems to be the locus of undisciplined agricultural people from all other areas, who migrate out here with the expectation of finding new opportunities in a land "flowing with milk and honey." That this movement is not abating is shown by a survey made by the Department of Agriculture with reference to 1937, now this time taken from the drought areas have located in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho

INCREASE OR DECREASE IN PERCENTAGE OF ALL
FARMS THAT WERE OPERATED BY TENANTS
From 1930 to 1935

4.

DECREASE

STATE

INCREASE

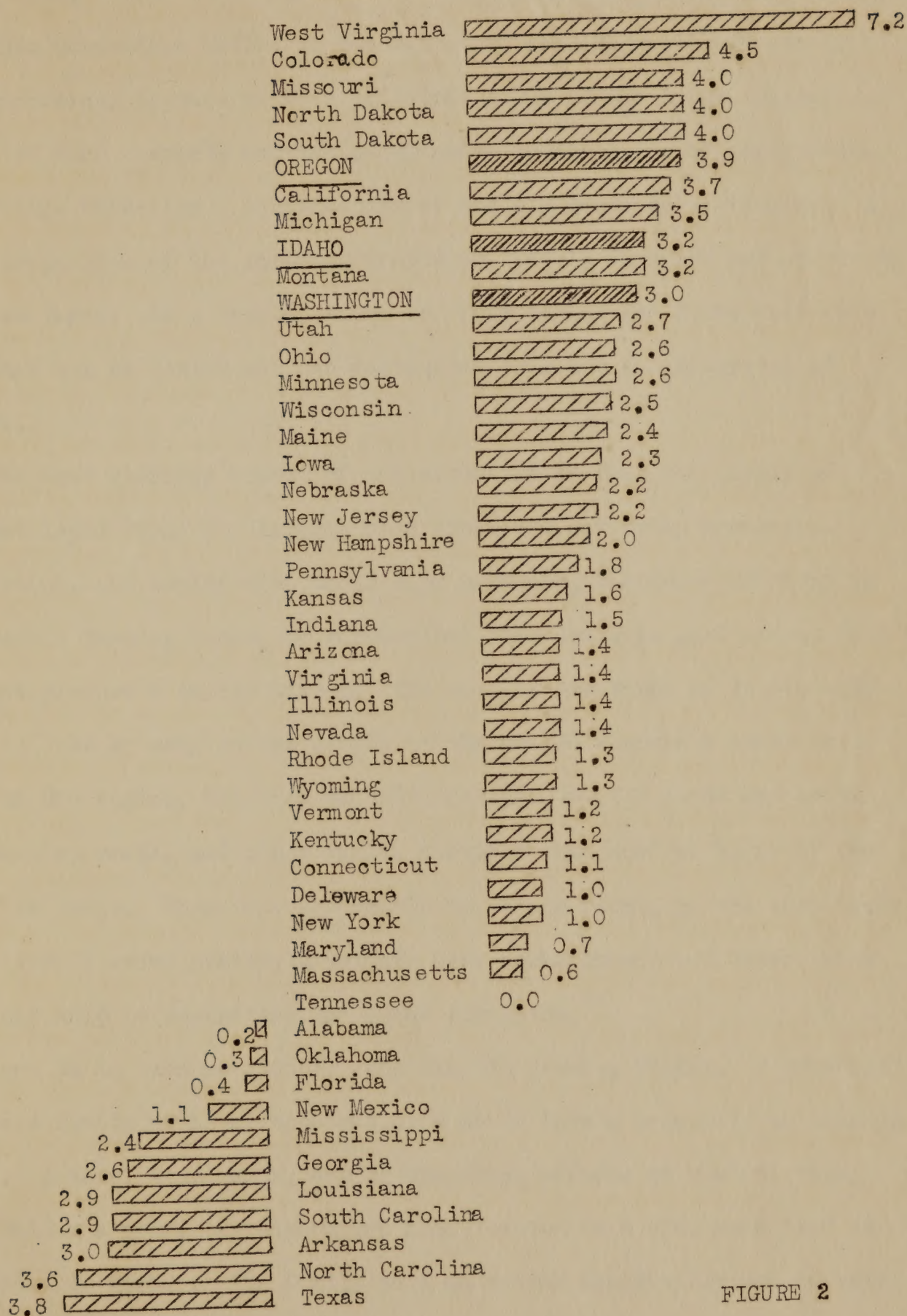


FIGURE 2

during 1936.

This tremendous influx of new settlers, combined with effects of the depression, appears to be a principal cause of the large increase in number of farm tenants; and the prospective continuation of immigration of settlers threatens a continuation of the big increase in tenancy. A large proportion of the incoming people are poorly financed and unable to purchase farms. As a result, there is great demand for every available farm that can be rented and the consequent increase in proportion of tenants.

The most alarming aspect of the situation is that the supply of good developed farms has largely been exhausted and these newcomers are renting, and buying with small down payments, thousands of farms in submarginal farming areas, or submarginal farm units in good areas, that will not produce a family living. The results are bound to be not only eventual loss by many of the people of the meagre resources which they bring to the region, but tremendously increased relief loads and costs for schools, roads, and other public services that must be borne by the public at large. Those who are unable to obtain farms, or who lose their farms after a short period, gravitate into agricultural and other labor ranks and help to demoralize the labor situation.

Here is an extreme example from Lincoln County, Oregon. A practically destitute family with thirteen children moved into a community in Lincoln County. A local land owner, out of sympathy, offered to rent to them, for a dollar a year, his unoccupied farm located on a side road that is impassable in winter. The family went on relief immediately and is still

on relief and, worst of all, in order to provide schooling for the children it was necessary to reopen a school that had previously been closed and should have remained closed. Although this is an extreme case, there are many hundreds who are locating in isolated undesirable areas. The fact that a large proportion of the many tenant farmers throughout the region are of this type is what makes the tenancy situation in the Pacific Northwest extremely critical and deserving of study and relief.

Now along with this situation we have the fact that the three states of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho undoubtedly have a far greater area of potential good agricultural land than any other part of the country. Thousands of new farmers have located on this potential land in the past and are carving out comfortable and happy homes and profitable farm businesses. There is still room for many thousands more to do likewise, but with present lack of supplementary employment and high costs of land development, it is impossible for a family without considerable capital to do so without government financing and assistance.

If a comprehensive program for assisting settlers to become established on new agricultural land in the Pacific Northwest could be inaugurated, it not only would go far in alleviating the critical farm tenancy situation, but would provide new homes for many thousands of the surplus agricultural population in various other parts of the country. It appears that a federal program of assistance in this connection should be carried out along three lines:

1. Government purchase, subdivision, and sale to new settlers of large tracts of developed agricultural land.

on relief and, worse of all, in order to provide schooling for the children. It was necessary to equip a school that had previously been closed and should have remained closed. Although there is an extreme need, there are many hundreds who are living in isolated mountainous areas. The fact that a large proportion of the many farmers throughout the region are of this type is what makes the emergency situation in the Pacific Northwest extremely critical and deserving of study and relief.

Now along with this situation we have the fact that the three states of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho undoubtedly have a far greater area of potential forest agricultural land than any other part of the country. Thousands of new farmers have located on this potential land in the past and are deriving great satisfaction and happy homes and profitable farm businesses. There is still room for many thousands more to do likewise, but with present lack of supplementary equipment and high costs of land settlement, it is impossible for a family without considerable capital to do so without government financing and assistance.

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1. Government purchase, subdivision, and sale to new settlers of large tracts of developed agricultural land.

2. Public work projects for development of land by clearing, irrigation, and drainage.
3. A program of long-term rehabilitation loans to new settlers for purposes of land purchase and improvement.

X In the Pacific Northwest as in other parts of the country, present systems of farm leasing are resulting in much impoverishment of soil, increase in soil erosion, spread of noxious weeds and other destruction of our land resources, as well as an undesirable type of rural life and social conditions. There is crying need for a revision of leasing terms that will make for greater security of tenure, conservation of the soil and better farming. Much can and is being done in this direction through education, and indirectly through the Agricultural Conservation program, but special legislation on farm leasing terms also is needed.

2. Public work projects for improvement of land by clearing, irrigation, and reforestation.

3. A program of land reclamation and improvement for purposes of land reclamation and improvement.

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Program, but essential legislation on new leasing terms also is needed.

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